

PICTURESQUE MEXICO

CHAPTER I

ANCIENT HISTORY OF MEXICO

FEW people outside the fair republic of Mexico know anything of its wonderful resources; its beautiful atmosphere of romance; its remarkable development; its charming, progressive men and women; its lovely natural beauties; and, least of all, of the spirit of modern enterprise that has entered in and taken possession of the land. In considering the development of this wonderful country, with a civilization in some respects older than that of the United States, the object is to present a true picture of Mexico to-day; to look into the reasons why the spirit of progress and advancement was not brought into play earlier in its history; to give some account of the wonderful and rapid development of the past few years; and to convey to the civilized world an adequate idea of the possibilities of immediate and profitable extension of existing industries, and of the introduction of new ones; for Mexico—beautiful, historic, splendid Mexico—has undreamed-of possibilities in a commercial sense, and is becoming one of the leading republics of the earth, a nation celebrated in industrial enterprise as well as artistic and natural beauty.

Why, then, with all her advantages, has not this fair land made greater progress since her settlement three hundred years ago? Why has not this country of such beauty and such resources, of wealth incalculable and noble patriotic people, developed sooner and taken her place as the literary, commercial, and educational centre of the western hemisphere, just as she is the geographical centre?

Let us look at the history of other nations for a moment. All records of the past show that different nations and races have led in civilization, in commerce, and in war at various periods in the world's great story. Egypt and Phœnicia, Assyria and Babylon, succeeded each other as masters and leaders of the known world, but the dynasty of each gave way in due course of events. Greece took her place as the ruling nation, only to be followed by Rome. Then the fall of the Western Empire, in 476, ensued; while the accession of Hildebrand, in 1073, made another turning-point in history, followed by a troublous, changing, historic, kaleidoscopic picture, in which Europe and even a part of Asia were colors in the great prism of the world. Venice became mistress of the seas, and sent her ships to whiten the seas of both hemispheres. Her wealth increased, and with it her power; her traders enriched themselves from the Orient, and for a time she, too, reigned supreme. Then the fall of Constantinople

closed the East to the nations of Western Europe, and her navigators had to seek new pathways to wealth, new worlds to conquer, and, most important of all, as they thought, new roadsteads to Oriental marts. Four great nations—Spain, Portugal, France, and Great Britain—each sought for this pathway. Their most experienced navigators were called into requisition, and each sought studiously for a new gate-way to the treasure-gardens of the East. Their ships sailed in every direction; their keels ploughed the seas far and near; their faith was great, and their persistence was greater; they sought with an unparalleled zeal to find out another way to the old market, or a new one to conquest and increase of trade.

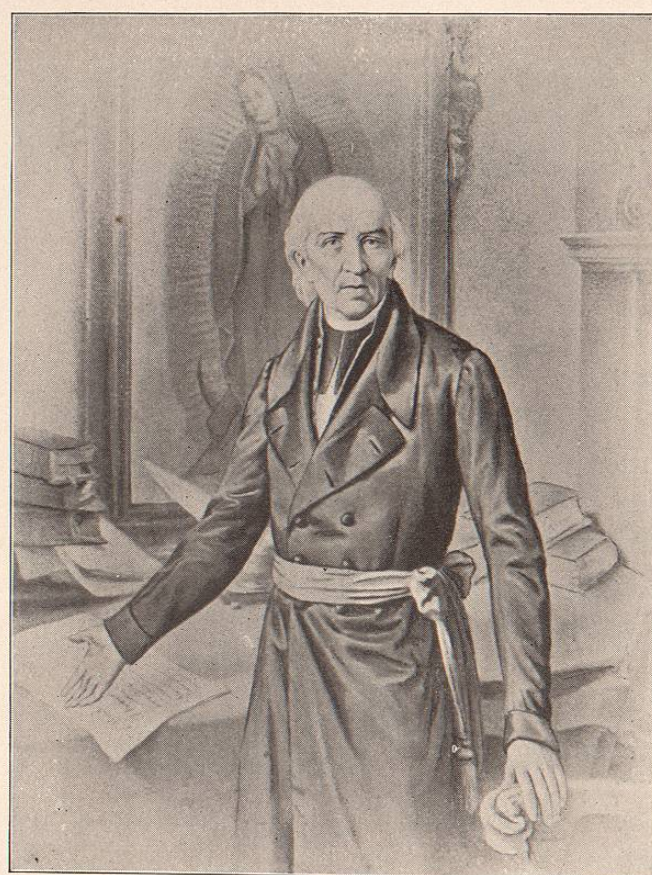
Christopher Columbus was but one of the many who crossed and recrossed each other in pursuit of the petty quarrels and their sovereigns con-India and its lands records of history, was visited by all from the religious one Cross, to the pitiless the power of his king condition being that treasury a goodly fruits of his expeditions of gleaming

When these Mexico they met a but at last, under the great peninsula mighty oceans and subdued, and the coffers of the Montezumas rapidly diminishing. The native speech, dence were sacrificed for against the Church army, hand in hand,

subjects of Montezuma do? The ravages of war kept up for years. Attacks external and civil on the Spanish treasury were supported or materially aided by taxes extorted from Mexico and her sister colonies of the West Indies; and while armies of men poured from Spain into Mexico, floods of silver poured from the land of the Montezumas into old Castile.

The crown of Spain had discovered here a fairy godmother. The king had only to wish, and wealth poured into the royal coffers without stint or measure.

Three centuries of Spanish rule ensued,—centuries of watchful jealousy lest other hands should profane the beauties or sack the treasures of Mexico. It is estimated that the treasures mounted to the almost incredible sum of nearly three billion five hundred millions of dollars. No wonder Spain was a careful mother to her adopted daughter. And this does not include the astonishing amounts carried off by all sorts of explorers for their own enrichment, nor the millions extorted by the Church of Rome as her tithes from the New World.



HIDALGO.

same quest. Their the greater ones of cerning the New and inhabitants are Our own hemisphere grades of explorers, in the name of the trader who boasted to help him,—his only he pay into the royal percentage of the tion, gathered at the swords.

ravagers reached sturdy resistance; the colors of Spain, washed by two its aborigines were tents of the strong zumas went to fill the Castilian treasury. religion, and independence to Rome and Spain; and the Spanish what could the sub-

During these centuries the gold and silver seemed without limit. The East, with relentless avarice, grasped the silver; the West, with never-satisfied appetite, ate up the gold. Like the beggar of the streets, their cry was "give" more and ever more. The ability of the plunderers to extort by any means both from ancient treasures and newly opened mines was the only limit to this ceaseless flow.

It was a wicked waste, for only the richer veins and ores were manipulated; the remainder were left for future generations, should there ever be need for more laborious process amid such bounteous profusion of wealth.

And so the glittering harvest was reaped during succeeding years, which multiplied into centuries. It was a harvest which needed not to wait for seed-time. It was always ready. Every ship was laden with it; every man who touched it became rich. And yet, to-day, lying in the depths of the mountains, flashing in the streams, or glinting in the light of open day, it is there,—every kind of precious stone and precious metal,—far exceeding in amount and value those that have ever enriched England or Asia, and are scattered in such abundance over whole districts of the United States of North America.

But, in view of these three centuries of ravage and pillage, is it any wonder that Mexico did not develop into an independent country? Yielding up her vast treasures to enrich the crowns of her oppressors, how could she gain independence or develop even the consciousness of her own strength and power?

And yet, in all the days since the Spanish conquest, agriculture, where it has been in any degree advisable to till the fields, has not been neglected. In many places it has only been necessary to touch the earth with a spade for it to respond with abundant harvests. The wants of the natives were simple, and nature ever generous. The happy inhabitants, therefore, had not found it necessary to cultivate arable lands, or to try to wrest from a rugged soil a scanty living.

Where costly jewels were the possession of the humblest, and a friendly climate not only makes slight the demand for food but produces it in the greatest profusion, agriculture would, naturally, not acquire great value; and in those years the principal ambition was for gold.

It was not until the various colonies to the north of them had achieved their independence, and had come to be known as a new nation, the United States of America, that the Mexicans began to indulge the spirit of patriotism and the desire for independence which are implanted by nature in every human breast. Other patriots had succeeded in establishing their rights to freedom and its privileges, why not they?

As the years went on, this restless desire for liberty grew among the patriots of Mexico. The fruits, the wealth, the prodigal bounty of the country were theirs, they felt, by inheritance; why should they go to enrich the coffers of a foreign country while they were kept here in poverty and oppression? In 1798 the Spanish viceroy began to discover signs of the uprising that broke out with such force a few years later, under the noble Hidalgo. Even then the Mexicans had decided in their secret hearts that Mexico should no longer be New Spain either in name or in fact. She should be free. She should govern her own country and worship in her own church. She should come into her own Kingdom of Liberty.

It was a bloody struggle, however, and one that was several times repeated ere the victory was gained and Mexico became firmly established as one of the republics of the world.

Hidalgo and his patriots made a noble fight, but internal dissensions and foreign invasions followed; the valuable mines, sacked for centuries by other rulers, had to be abandoned, and the tillable lands were left untouched. The patriots were fighting in the cause of honor and

trying to wrest the crown of liberty from their oppressors, while starvation stared them in the face. It is always so in a desperate revolution. Liberty is to be won only by the sacrifice of many human lives.

And so the older patriots fought, bled, and died for their country, while their places were taken by younger men who continued the battle for progress and freedom, and only the Indians of the mountain fastnesses were left free from care or ambitions.

Mexico's history has been singularly cursed by the greed of gold and lust of power on the part of foreign potentates. Her inexhaustible treasures have, in past ages, been to her, in a sense, a curse rather than a blessing; since it was only the greed of gold which brought the cruel, grinding oppressor, who for centuries kept her under the iron heel of the conquerors. While Mexico waited, many a less favored settlement rose to the distinction of a nation, and smaller colonies rose to proud prominence.

But Mexico was oppressed and despoiled in vain. Slowly, perhaps, her courage rose to the point of resistance, but when the day of struggle came her spirit was indomitable. Beaten repeatedly, thrust down from temporary acquisitions more than once, she knew not the meaning of the word defeat. Again and again she rose fresh from discouragement; and with a persistence that was almost divine, and a courage that comes only from the God of Liberty, cried, undismayed, "Mexico shall be free! Mexico shall take her place among the independent nations of the earth!"

And so the young republic to-day stands strong and free, with the crown of liberty on her brow and the unconquerable hope of ages on her face; with eager gaze on the goal far in the distant future, with ambition in her young breast, with the lethargy of centuries thrown from her like a discarded garment, and with inspiration drawn with every breath from the spirit of modern progress, Mexico will soon rank with the mightiest nations of earth.

As relics of past ages are noble buildings and public works which put to blush any in her neighboring countries; as accomplishments of the present are her railroads, her telegraph system, her business enterprise developing with every morn; as auguries of the future are the many wise projects for developing the vast resources of the land, together with the same proud, indomitable spirit that brought her out from the land of bondage and made her a "home of the free and a land of the brave."

This is the Mexico that Hidalgo, Morelos, Juarez, Lerdo, and Ocampo died for. It is to these men that Mexico owes so much of past, present, and future achievement. Modest, brave, and unselfish, they have fought better than they knew; and to-day they are themselves the pedestal on which their goddess stands on high, seen and admired by every nation in the world.

No country can succeed without good and brave men, whose patriotism is far above any greed of gain or desire for pelf. It is such men that make the Mexico of to-day.

The history of Mexico may be divided into ancient and modern, and the latter subdivided into two periods, the colonial and that of independence. Notwithstanding the numerous theories advanced concerning the primitive inhabitants of the country, all is still wrapped in profound obscurity. Tradition and the existing remnants of ancient structures point to a more remote and perhaps a higher civilization than that which filled the early Spanish conquerors with admiration; but neither can assist in determining the name or the origin of the first immigrants. Historic ground in Mexico is not reached until the end of the sixth century; all beyond belongs to the domain of mythology. The Toltecs came to the valley of Mexico, and

there built their capital, Tollan, toward the beginning of the seventh century. According to one theory they came from Guatemala; another theory represents them as crossing from Asia to America, by a chain of islands which, in remote ages, stretched at the north from the shores of the Eastern to those of the Western continent. They are described as an agricultural people, clothed in long tunics, sandals, and straw hats; not very warlike, but humane and civilized, and proficient in the highest mechanical arts; erecting gigantic edifices; having a worship not sanguinary; and inventing the system of astronomy afterward adopted by the Tezcucans and Mexicans.

The first Toltec dynasty is said to have been founded early in the eighth century by Icoatzin. After a lapse of about five hundred years, the kingdom of Tollan, reduced by civil strifes, pestilence, and famine, was divided, and many of the surviving inhabitants migrated southward. The Toltecs were the first tribe to leave a written account of their nationality and polity; they are regarded in Mexican history as the primitive nation of the country, and their epoch is taken as the starting-point of a fixed chronology of the native annals. With the downfall of their monarchy terminated the civilization of the north.

Not long afterward, the Chichimecs, described as a fierce northern tribe, living by the chase, dwelling in caverns or straw huts, monogamous, and worshipping the sun as their father and the earth as their mother, came to the Toltec country, which they did not conquer, as they met with no resistance, but merely occupied peacefully, settling in the same towns with the Toltecs who remained from the general emigration. The descendants of these Toltecs became once more numerous and prosperous, and, taking the name of Colhuis or Culhuas, founded Colhuacan, on the margin of the lake. Between the arrival of the Chichimecs and the end of the twelfth century, tradition mentions the influx of a multitude of other northern tribes, chief among whom were the Tepanecs, who, with Atzacapozalco as their capital, established an independent state, and became gradually so powerful that in later times two of their kings usurped the throne of Tezcuco. Another of these tribes were the Techichimecs, the founders of the Tlaxcalan republic, and all of them spoke the Nahoia or Nahuatl tongue. After these came the Acolhuis, likewise of Nahoia origin, and consequently kindred to the Toltecs, and especially distinguished among all the immigrants by the Chichimecs as being the most refined. From them the latter readily learned agriculture, the mechanic arts, and town life, and the two races became so completely intermingled as at last to be confounded in one great nation in the kingdom of Tezcuco or Acolhuacan, a name indicating that not only the customs and culture of the Acolhuis prevailed, but also their language, which was incomparably more perfect than the Chichimecan.



BENITO JUAREZ.